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Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire

Technological University Dublin, mairtin.Macconiomaire@tudublin.ie

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Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire Ph.D.

Dublin Institute of Technology, Mairtin.Macconiomaire@dit.ie

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LOUIS JAMMET

A FRENCH PIONEER

Mairtin MacConlomaire

LOUIS JAMMET WAS born in July 1894 in London and came to Dublin with his family following his father, Michel Jammet's appointment as chef to the then Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Cadogan at the Vice Regal Lodge in 1895. Michel had first come to Dublin as chef to Henry Roe, the distiller who had restored St Patrick's Cathedral in the mid-19th century. After several years with Roe he returned to France. In 1900 Michel and his brother François Jammet bought the Burlington dining rooms and restaurant at 27 St Andrew Street whose speciality was oysters from the red bank oyster beds of the Burren in County Clare. Thoms' Directory 1901 has an entry for Burlington Restaurant and oyster saloons, which is listed as Jammet's for the first time in the 1902 edition.

The Jammet brothers were natives of Quillan in the French Pyrenees. François Jammet returned to Paris in 1908 but the restaurant traded at 26-27 Andrew Street and 6 Church Lane until their lease reverted back to the Hibernian Bank in 1926. Peter Somerville-Large (1981) describes the entertainment available in Dublin pre 1916 thus: *'Bowler-hatted citizens could attend a few good restaurants like the Bailey or the one opened by the Lord Lieutenant's chef, Monsieur Jammet, in Andrew Street which moved to Nassau Street in 1926.'*

In 1926 Michel acquired Kidd's Restaurant at 45-46 Nassau Street and brought some of the fittings from the original premises. He died in the following year.



Louis Jammet in his restaurant with Bill Grimes

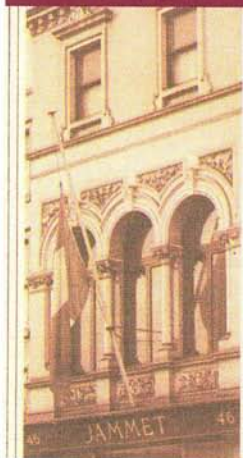
Louis Jammet was educated in Belvedere College Dublin and joined the French army as an ordinary soldier during the First World War. He was wounded in his right arm and was fortunate not to lose it. After the war he studied engineering in l'École Centrale in Paris where he met his wife Yvonne, a second cousin from a strong restaurant family. One side of the family owned the 'Hotel Bristol' and on the other the 'Le Boeuf à la Mode' both in Paris. Louis worked as an engineer in France until his father's death. Following the bereavement, Louis and Yvonne decided to move to Dublin and run the business. He bought out his sister's share of the business, and expanded on his father's achievement of running Ireland's best restaurant.

The new restaurant in Nassau Street had as a centrepiece four

murals depicting the Four Seasons painted by the artist Bossini, in order to discharge his bill in the old Burlington Restaurant. The new premises was described by John Ryan, a regular customer, as follows: *'The main dining room was pure French Second Empire, with a lovely faded patina to the furniture, snow white linen, well cut crystal, monogrammed porcelain, gourmet sized silver-plated cutlery and gleaming decanters'.* It became the haunt for the artists and the literary set, and the Jammet's took pride in the fact that it was Dublin's only French Restaurant.

There were two entrances. The 'posh' one was in Nassau Street; the ordinary one was in an alley off Grafton Street at Adam's Court. It had a smoking room and an Oyster Bar where lunch could be taken at a wide marble counter from a high stool. The literati drank here, figures like Liam O'Flaherty, Seán O' Sullivan and the artist Harry Kernoff whose painting of Jammet's is now housed in Patrick Guilbaud's Restaurant at the Merrion Hotel. Louis's wife Yvonne had a reputation of her own as an excellent painter and sculptor and as a member of the avant garde painters group 'The White Stag'.

One satisfied customer summed up the fabulous fare in Jammet's during the years of the Second World War as *'the finest French cooking between the fall of France and the Liberation of Paris'*. The war years, with food shortages and rationing in Britain, created a tremendous demand, which grew as the war



*'the finest French
cooking between
the fall of France
and the Liberation
of Paris'*

The frontage of Jammet's Restaurant.

dragged on. American GI's, according to John Ryan, *'cigar-chomping and in full uniform, were streaming across our neutral border to sample the fabulous food in the prodigious quantities available here. Jammet's could not and did not fail'*.

The youngest daughter Róisín recalls meeting an ex-American Colonel at a party who had eaten in Jammet's during the war and later on his visits to Ireland purchasing horses, and had brought his wife to

Ireland to dine at Jammet's only to find it closed. After the war, when films began to be made in Ardmore studios, the stars would converge on Jammet's. It was the place to be seen during the 1950s and early 1960s.

The Jammets had four children Michel, Raymonde, Patrick and Róisín. Louis died quite suddenly in October 1964 and the running of the restaurant fell to Patrick, the only member of the family who had

worked in the business. Patrick's health had been poor most of his life and when his mother died in 1967 he decided to close the restaurant for good.

The building has since housed Judge Roy Beans restaurant bar and Lillie's Bordello night club and is now to be converted into a Porterhouse.

Louis Jammet contributed to the formation of some of the leading figures in the Irish restaurant industry over the years. These included Willie O'Regan, Jimmy Beggan, Christy Sands, Charles Opperman, Mark Fore, Vincent Dowling, Frank Farren, Liam Kavanagh and P.J. Dunne. Many of these chefs and waiters went on to become the future teachers, mentors and standard bearers of the hospitality industry both in Ireland and abroad.

Jammet's closed its doors in 1967, but the influence of Michel and Louis Jammet has left an indelible mark on the world of culinary arts and Irish society.